

# American Sociological Association Vs American College of Pediatricians: Use and Abuse of Sociology in Amicus Briefs to the Supreme Court

In two amici briefs before the Supreme Court for the hearing of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, social scientists argue for two different conclusions about the effects of same-sex parenting. The first, written by the American Sociological Association (ASA), claims that there are no differences between children of same-sex parents and children of opposite-sex parents. The second brief, written by the American College of Pediatricians (ACP) et al., claims that children of same-sex parents suffer substantially worse outcomes than children of opposite-sex parents.

## **American Sociological Association:**

There is no difference in academic achievement between children of same-sex parents and children of different-sex parents, pages 6-7.[\[i\]](#)

Children raised by same-sex parents have similar levels of cognitive development as those with different-sex parents, page 8.[\[iii\]](#)

There is no difference in social adjustment or psychosocial development between children raised by same-sex parents and those raised by different-sex parents, page 8-9.[\[v\]](#)

There are no greater levels of anxiety or attention-deficit disorder among teenagers raised by same-sex parents, pages 9-10.[\[vii\]](#)

Adolescents raised by same-sex parents have similar levels of self-esteem and depression to those raised by different-sex parents, page 9.[\[ix\]](#)

17 year olds raised by same-sex parents reported higher age at first intercourse than those raised by different-sex parents, page 12.[\[xi\]](#)

Adolescents living with lesbian parents are similar to those raised by different-sex parents in substance use (i.e. tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana) and delinquent behavior, page 12.[\[xiii\]](#)

## **American College of Pediatricians et al.:**

Children raised by same-sex parents are 35% less likely to graduate from high school, page 18.[\[ii\]](#)

Children with same-sex parents are twice as likely to have psychological disorders and learning disabilities, page 20.[\[iv\]](#)

Children with same-sex parents are almost twice as likely to have a developmental disability and are much more likely to have serious emotional or mental health problems, page 20.[\[vi\]](#)

Children with same-sex parents are much more likely to suffer from anxiety and ADHD, pages 20, 39.[\[viii\]](#)

As adults, persons who had lesbian mothers during childhood are more likely to be depressed and to have significantly lower well-being, page 17.[\[x\]](#)

Children of lesbian mothers are ten times more likely to have been sexually touched by a parent or other adult and are four times more likely to have been forced to have sex against their will, pages 17-18.[\[xii\]](#)

As adults, persons with lesbian mothers were more likely to smoke, use marijuana, to have been arrested and to have pled guilty when arrested, page 17.[\[xiv\]](#)

A summary of the findings demonstrates the disagreement between the two schools of research:

The American Sociological Association repeatedly appeals to the “social science consensus” that there are no differences between children of same-sex parents and children of opposite-sex parents. The American College of Pediatricians et al. demonstrate that there is no such consensus. Social science studies must have a random sample and statistical significance in order to support credible population claims, but the ACP et al. note that only eight of all the studies cited by the ASA meet this longstanding statistical standard. Of these eight studies, four support the ASA’s “no difference” position and four support the ACP’s position. Yet, the four remaining studies used to support “no difference” claims are invalid because 40-60% of the children reported as having same-sex parents are actually children with opposite-sex parents.<sup>[xv]</sup> Three of these four studies, written by Wainright et al., used the same survey, in which 27 of the 44 couples classified as same-sex are actually opposite-sex couples.

Paul Sullins, research professor of sociology at Catholic University of America and contributor to the ACP brief, corrected the data used in these three studies to include only clear cases of same-sex parents and re-analyzed Wainright et al.’s first study.<sup>[xvi]</sup> He found that children with opposite-sex parents have better outcomes than children with same-sex parents. In particular, the corrected data showed that children of opposite-sex parents had better outcomes when those parents were married; however, children of same-sex couples actually had worse outcomes when their same-sex parents were married.<sup>[xvii]</sup> This Wainright study, used by ASA to support “no difference” claims, actually refutes these claims. For example, the ASA found that children of same-sex parents and children of opposite-sex parents have similar levels of self-esteem and depression. After correcting the data, this study actually showed that the children of same-sex couples who self-identified as “married” had significantly higher rates of depression and unhappiness. The ASA also used the miscoded data from the Wainright study to claim that teenagers with same-sex parents have similar sexual experiences to those of teenagers with opposite-sex parents (similar proportions have had sexual intercourse or a romantic relationship). Using the corrected data from these studies, Sullins found that their sexual experiences are radically different. In particular, he found that children raised by same-sex parents had significantly higher rates of forced sexual intercourse and sexual molestation by a parent or adult caregiver.

Finally, the ASA criticizes the research used by the ACP et al. in their amicus brief. A summary of the ASA’s criticisms and ACP’s counter-arguments follows:

**ASA’s Criticisms:**

Regnerus compares children raised by two married, biological parents with children of parents who at some time had a same-sex relationship. The differences can be attributed to the difference in family stability, not same-sex vs. different-sex. Pages 22-27.

**ACP’s Counter-Arguments:**

Regnerus did control for family stability by comparing children of same-sex parents with children of divorced, opposite-sex parents. Furthermore, the significant statistical differences stand because the ASA, though stating that they are *entirely due* to other factors, has not shown that *any other* factors account for them. Page 18.

Sullins fails to account for family stability, which has a significant effect on child outcomes. Page 11.

Sullins's studies did not undergo a rigorous peer review process, which should take months to complete. Page 11.

Sullins measured family stability in two ways: by housing status and by comparing same-sex parent families to only opposite-sex step-parent families. Taking these measurements of stability into account only minimally decreased the substantial differences of emotional problem. Pages 23-24.

The peer review process is much shorter in hard-science medical journals than family sociology journals and, therefore, the time to acceptance for Sullins's paper was not short. Sullins's central study was also subjected to twice the ordinary peer review. Finally, the publisher of Sullins's studies received from *Science* the highest ranking possible among publishers for peer review rigor. [\[xviii\]](#) Pages 26-29.

The ASA and ACP present contradictory findings on the effects of same-sex parenting. This contradiction exists because the ASA and ACP use different sources. However, the majority of the ASA's sources are not credible because they fail either to use a random sample or to be statistically significant. The findings of the four sources they use that are statistically significant are also invalid because they miscode opposite-sex couples as same-sex couples. Instead, the findings of one of these studies, once the data is corrected, demonstrate that children of married same-sex couples have significantly worse outcomes. Finally, ACP et al. satisfactorily refute the ASA's primary criticisms of their research.

In conclusion, the ASA positions are disproved by evidence and its criticisms overcome by data, method and logic. The ACP et al. dismantled the entire body of the ASA's purported "social science consensus" with two shots – demonstrating the studies are either unable to deliver credible population claims or invalid due to extremely problematic coding errors. By contrast the ACP et al. makes strong, supported, and methodologically sound arguments demonstrating that children of same-sex parent families fare significantly worse than children of opposite-sex parent families, in all the measured outcomes.

[\[i\]](#) Alicia L. Fedewa & Teresa P. Clark, *Parent Practices and Home-School Partnerships: A Differential Effect for Children with Same-Sex Coupled Parents?*, 5 *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 312 (2009).

Daniel Potter, *Same-Sex Parent Families and Children's Academic Achievement*, 74 *Journal of Marriage and Family* 556 (June 2012).

Douglas W. Allen et al., *Nontraditional Families and Childhood Progress Through School: A Comment on Rosenfeld*, 50 *Demography* 955 (June 2013).

Jennifer L. Wainright et al., *Psychosocial Adjustment, School Outcomes, and Romantic Relationships of Adolescents with Same-Sex Parents*, 75 *Child Development* 1886 (Dec. 2004).

Michael J. Rosenfeld, *Nontraditional Families and Childhood Progress Through School*, 47 *Demography* 755 (Aug. 2010).

[iii] Douglas W. Allen, *High school graduation rates among children of same-sex households*, 11 *REVIEW OF ECONOMICS OF THE HOUSEHOLD* 635 (2013).

[iii] Justin A. Lavner et al., *Can Gay and Lesbian Parents Promote a Healthy Development in High Risk Children Adopted from Foster Care?*, 82 *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 465 (2012).

[iv] D. Paul Sullins, *Emotional Problems among Children with Same-sex Parents: Difference by Definition*, 7 *BRITISH JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, SOCIETY AND BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE* 99 (2015).

[v] Alicia L. Fedewa & Teresa P. Clark, *Parent Practices and Home-School Partnerships: A Differential Effect for Children with Same-Sex Coupled Parents?*, 5 *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 312 (2009).

Fiona Tasker, *Lesbian Mothers, Gay Fathers and Their Children: A Review*, 26 *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* 224 (June 2005).

Jennifer L. Wainright & Charlotte J. Patterson, *Peer Relations Among Adolescents with Female Same-Sex Parents*, 44 *Developmental Psychology* 117 (2008).

[vi] D. Paul Sullins, *Emotional Problems among Children with Same-sex Parents: Difference by Definition*, 7 *BRITISH JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, SOCIETY AND BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE* 99 (2015).

[vii] Nanette K. Gartrell & Henny Bos, *US National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study: Psychological Adjustment of 17-Year-Old Adolescents*, 126 *Pediatrics* 28 (2010).

[viii] Sullins, *Emotional Problems*. Sullins' analysis of Wainright.

[ix] Jennifer L. Wainright et al., *Psychosocial Adjustment, School Outcomes, and Romantic Relationships of Adolescents with Same-Sex Parents*, 75 *Child Development* 1886 (Dec. 2004).

[x] Mark Regnerus, *How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study*, 41 *SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH* 752 (2012).

[xi] Nanette K. Gartrell et al., *New Trends in Same-Sex Sexual Contact for American Adolescents?*, 41 *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 5 (2011).

[xii] Mark Regnerus, *How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study*, 41 SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH 752 (2012).

[xiii] Jennifer L. Wainright & Charlotte J. Patterson, *Delinquency, Victimization, and Substance Use Among Adolescents with Female Same-Sex Parents*, 20 Journal of Family Psychology 526 (2006).

[xiv] Mark Regnerus, *How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study*, 41 SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH 752 (2012).

Nanette K. Gartrell & Henny Bos, *US National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study: Psychological Adjustment of 17-Year-Old Adolescents*, 126 Pediatrics 28 (2010).

[xv] Brief of Amici Curiae American College of Pediatricians et al., 30.

[xvi] Jennifer L. Wainright et al., *Psychosocial Adjustment, School Outcomes, and Romantic Relationships of Adolescents with Same-Sex Parents*, 75 Child Development 1886 (Dec. 2004).

[xvii] Brief of Amici Curiae American College of Pediatricians et al., 36-41.

[xviii] This ranking was received by *Science*, the world's premiere scientific journal, in an assessment of peer review at over three hundred scientific publishers, page 29.